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They'd Have the Biggest Time You Ever Saw: Square Dances as Settings for Community Social Interaction in Trigg County, Kentucky ca. 1920-1979

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THEY'D HAVE THE BIGGEST TIME YOU EVER SAW: SQUARE DANCES AS SETTINGS FOR COMMUNITY SOCIAL INTERACTION IN TRIGG COUNTY, KENTUCKY CA. 1920-1979

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THEY'D HAVE THE BIGGEST TIME YOU EVER SAW: SQUARE DANCES AS SETTINGS FOR COMMUNITY SOCIAL INTERACTION IN TRIGG COUNTY, KENTUCKY CA. 1920-1979

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This study focuses upon dance events, those occasions which have as their purpose the convening of persons to square dance or play party games which resemble square dances. Four differnt forms of these events were identified in Trigg County, Kentucky: neighborhood dances, play-parties, picnics and barbecues and public dances. I have described them from a historical perspective, examining the social interactions that occurred during the events.

The major portion of the information presented was gathered through interviews with current and past residents of this county. The descriptions span the years from the turn of the twentieth century to the 1970s. The years just before and during World War II were a time of great social change in this area, which was reflected in the decline of neighborhood dances, picnics and barbecues and play-parties and the development of the public dance.

By describing the entire complex of dance event forms I have attempted to show the relationships among them and how the events varied to suit different sets of circumstances. At the same time, the role of the dance events in general in affirming and strengthening a sense of community and in fulfilling the social needs of area residents has been described.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In order for individuals to form a recognizable community there must be events at which its members convene and interact. One form of community social gathering that is and has in the past been popular in the United States is dances. And in white communities these social dances have often been in the form of square dances. However, there has been very little scholarly examination of the dance event as a setting for community social interaction. It is the goal of this thesis to survey the various forms of dance events in context within the white community of Trigg County, Kentucky, as settings for social intercourse among community members.

This study will focus upon dance events, those occasions which have as their purpose, or at least part of their purpose, the convening of persons to square dance or play party games which resemble square dances. Therefore, the focus of my attention will not rest upon the dances or games themselves, but on the events at which dancing and playing takes place. I have included play-parties within the realm of dance events because, although they are a distinct form of interaction, in the community they seem to fill a societal niche as if they were square dances among certain groups of people who objected, for various reasons, to dancing to live music. To simplify general discussion, I will include play-parties under the term "dance event,"

while recognizing that formally they are distinct from square dances.

To clarify my use of the term "dance event," I intend it to mean a community gathering with dancing or playing party games as its focus. The necessity of using this rather awkward phrase arises from the fact that a "dance" can refer to either a specific square dance or the event at which dancing takes place. I intend to provide an overview from a historical perspective rather than focusing upon discrete occasions. I will describe the events, examine the social interactions that occurred at them, and draw some conclusions about the role of these dance events within the community. I will also discuss how these events and their functions have changed over the years.

I identify four distinct forms of dance events in Trigg County. I have categorized them as neighborhood dances, picnics and barbecues, play-parties and public dances. Although I have developed this classification system for my own convenience, these categories are easily recognized by the persons whom I have interviewed about dance events. The different types of events are distinguished from each other by such characteristics as where they were located, who attended them and how the event was planned and carried out.

There are few scholarly studies that make the context and function of traditional dance events their focus. In fact, there have been very few studies of traditional dance events in the United States, the only exception being the body of work concerned with Native American dance traditions. The major studies presented by folklorists, such as those by Bethke, Burns and Mack, Botkin, Feintuch, Winslow and

Wolford, comprise the majority of the pertinent literature dealing with traditional dance events in white communities.[1]

To provide manageable limits for my study, I chose to focus on one particular county in southwestern Kentucky, Trigg County. The political boundaries of this county are clear; therefore, the problem of attempting to define a region by cultural traits, a thesis in itself, is neatly circumvented. I will deal only with the local white community, although I have heard references to black dance events which were separate functions restricted to the group of black area residents.

Trigg County is bordered on the south by the Kentucky-Tennessee state line and on the west by the Tennessee River. The county, basically rural with small settlements scattered through the area, has a total population of 8,900. The only incorporated town is Cadiz, the county seat. Currently thirty-eight percent of the total land area is owned by various government agencies. This land is incorporated into such installations as Fort Campbell Army Base, the

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[1]Robert D. Bethke, "Old-Time Fiddling and Social Dance in Central St. Lawrence County," New York Folklore Quarterly 30 (September, 1974): 163-184; Thomas A. Burns and Doris Mack, "Social Symbolism in A Rural Square Dance Event," (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1971, typewritten); Benjamin A. Botkin, The American Play-Party Song, University Studies of the University of Nebraska 38, nos. 1-4 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1937; reprint ed., New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1963); Burt Feintuch, "Dancing to the Music: Domestic Square Dances and Community in Southcentral Kentucky, ca. 1880-1940," Journal of the Folklore Instititute 18 (1981): 49-68; David J. Winslow, "The Rural Square Dance in the Northeastern United States: A Continuity of Tradition" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1972); and Leah J. Wolford, The Play-Party in Indiana, ed. W. Edson Richmand and William Tillson, Indiana Historical Society Publications 20, no. 2 (n.p.: Indiana Historical Society, 1917; reprint ed., Indianapolis: Indianapolis Historical Society, 1959).

Tennessee Valley Authority's Land Between the Lakes National Demonstration Area and Lake Barkley State Park.[2]

The first settlers in the area, mostly Virginians and North Carolinians, arrived in the last decades of the eighteenth century. By the Civil War the county had a population of 14,000, nearly twenty percent of them slaves. The Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, which flow only about ten miles apart, isolated the western third of the county, an area referred to historically as the "land between the rivers." The people between the rivers were separated from the rest of the county (before the 1930s there were no bridges across the rivers), and several of my informants referred to them as "clannish." With the consolidation of the county schools in the 1930s and improved roads this isolation began to diminish. Today no one lives between the rivers, which have been dammed to form Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkley, with the T.V.A. recreation area between the lakes.[3]

I chose the particular locale in which I conducted my research through fortuitous accident. I lived in Trigg County, Kentucky, while working at the Tennessee Valley Authority's Land Between the Lakes as an intern in cultural history interpretation. Primarily I worked at a historic restoration, The Homeplace-1850, where the local historic life style was depicted. In developing programs I wanted to draw upon local resources concerning music and dance. My situation provided an opportunity to have public

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[2]John Ed Pearce, "Trigg County," The Louisville Courier-Journal Magazine (July 13, 1980), pp. 6-11, 28-37.

[3]Ibid.

demonstrations by local dancers and musicians and participatory programs for visitors to the site. This situation led to meeting many residents of Trigg County who had the information and skills that I sought. Obviously, when developing this research project, I decided to concentrate on this area with which I had some familiarity.

Because my information is garnered primarily from past or current residents of this county, the time period on which I will concentrate is limited to that which my informants can remember, the twentieth century. Within that framework World War II served as a sort of chronological marker in a long series of major changes in the life style of county residents. My major emphasis will be on dance events from approximately the turn of the twentieth century until the war, including an examination of the changed social structure and how that affected these events. I will also look at dance events as late as 1979, in order to complete more clearly my description of the changes in dance events over time and to round out my analysis and conclusions.

The methodology employed in the project consists of two approaches: fieldwork, including participant observation, and examination of written records. The major source of my information was fieldwork conducted among present and past residents of Trigg County. I interviewed, with varying degrees of depth, approximately twenty persons. Most of the interviews took place in the homes of the informants, which I visted over a period of about eight months in 1979. In two cases I visited these people more than one time. In two instances interviews were held at the place of work of the informants--Trigg County High School and Land Between the Lakes. Several short

interviews were also held at the Senior Citizens' Center in Cadiz, Kentucky. The persons chosen to be interviewed were selected in a random manner from among persons I had met either through my job at Land Between the Lakes or my interest in square dances and play-parties, and from persons suggested to me as having information on the subject of local dance events.

In several instances I was not able to locate persons whom I desired to interview. Coincidently, most of my informants were from the southern half of the county. In an attempt to present a more balanced picture, I made two trips to the northern section in an attempt to locate additional source people. I stopped in several stores, post offices, and restaurants to inquire about knowledgable persons, but I do not feel these trips were very successful. However, I did obtain four interviews in this fashion. In general, the people whom I did interview cooperated with me completely and were most helpful.

All the interviews I conducted were tape recorded on cassettes using a Panasonic model RQ 2785 recorder, with the exception of one, when my informant requested that I not record the session. At the completion of this project a duplicate set of these cassettes will be deposited in the Folklore, Folklife and Oral History Archives at Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky. I obtained releases for the information contained on the cassettes to be used for educational purposes. To provide easy access to the information on the tapes, the interviews were indexed. In specific instances portions of interviews were transcribed verbatim. In the course of this paper, I will footnote particular interviews in those instances

where specific information was obtained from a specific person. However, when consensus among my informants on certain issues was apparent, no specific reference will be cited.

Information for this study was also obtained as a participant observer at the monthly square dance held at the Gibbs Community Center in the southern part of Trigg County. I attended this dance event four times while I was employed in the area from October, 1978, through March, 1979. During this time I had not yet decided to pursue this research project, so my intent in attending the square dance was not to gather information to be used for scholarly purposes. The last monthly dance held at the Center was in March, 1979, and therefore predates my serious attempts to pursue a scholarly examination of community dance events. In order to keep my memories as clear as possible, when I began my research I made some brief notes on this dance event, from as impartial a viewpoint as was possible, since I did not have the opportunity to verify my observations. In addition, attending this dance aided my rapport with several of my resource people because they recognized me and knew that I was a dancer and personally interested in square dancing.

Several different types of written sources were also consulted during this study. Local histories and records, which were very scarce, were used to provide background information on Trigg County. In a few instances those local materials provide mention of dance events. Materials on square dancing produced by enthusiasts, although generally not helpful because they do not deal with the issues with which I am concerned, did occasionally provide a small amount of information on square dance events in context. Other than the

few scholarly works dealing specifically with traditional dance events in white communities, some scholarly literature, particularly in the area of anthropology of dance, was employed to provide comparative and collaborative materials for my findings and to generate a model to use in examining my materials. A more complete review of pertinent literature will be included later in this study.

My own interest in square dancing has grown from my interest in "old-time" music, for lack of a clearer label. I am, in fact, a banjo player, and that skill has led me to meeting older musicians who play this same kind of music. Because these fiddle tunes are primarily dance music, discussions on the subject have often led to talk about square dances. I am also interested in square dancing because I am a dancer and caller. I am curious about the way square dance events were conducted in the past as compared to those in Trigg County today and the differences between traditional dance events in context and those square dances held by modern revivalists in both Kentucky and among basically urban enthusiasts. Many of the people I have met through musical associations have information on various aspects of these questions.

I believe that studying these community social events in context is an important key to understanding how a society functions because they inherently reflect some of the underlying values of a group of people. Besides adding to the body of knowledge specifically about traditional dance events in white communities, I hope that this study will aid in understanding how communities provide necessary opportunities to renew their identity and promote their own continuity.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are few scholarly studies of traditional dance events in the United States, and even fewer that make the context and function of traditional dance events their focus. Most of these available American studies are concerned with Native American practice. The few materials that are pertinent to my study of square dances and play-parties as settings for community social interaction are drawn from several academic categories, including general dance ethnology, scholarly studies of square dance events, and popular literature. These materials have been generated primarily by anthropologists, folklorists, popular historians and square dance enthusiasts.

Dance ethnologists, those anthropologists who study traditional dance events, have not concerned themselves with the square dance tradition in the United States. However, their work has dealt with theoretical issues and methodologies that have direct application to the study of any traditional dance form in context. A major survey article, "Panorama of Dance Ethnology," by Kurath, cites no studies dealing particularly with square dances, although it is an in-depth review of the field of dance ethnology up to 1960.[1]

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[1]Gertrude P. Kurath, "Panorama of Dance Ethnolgy," Current Anthropology 1 (May, 1960): 233-54.

A more recent survey by Kealiinohomoku, "Folk Dance," is concerned with such issues as developing a working definition of the term "folk dance" in its most general sense and is a brief survey of some of the traditional dance forms still common across the United States.[2] She also points out the lack of scholarly studies of traditional dance in the United States, including the contextual and functional aspects of dance forms.

Royce, in The Anthropology of Dance, sets forth a philosophical and methodological structure for ethnologic study of dance in the most detailed work on the subject to date.[3] She points out that dancing may be the least important of the activities found at a dance event and suggests that dance events are the proper unit of analysis for anthropological study, with two types of studies, structural and functional, being necessary. In Dance and Society Rust writes about the functional aspects of dance in society from the hypothetical premise that "variations in social dance are never fortuitous or random, but are always closely related to the social structure of society."[4] Unlike most anthropological studies that concern themselves with dance which has didactic or religious functions, the focus of Rust's study is social dancing in England from the 13th to the 20th centuries ("social dancing" referring to dancing for recreation and pleasure). Although little mention is made of social

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[2]Joann W. Kealiinohomoku, "Folk Dance," in Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction, ed. Richard M. Dorson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 381-404.

[3]Anya P. Royce, The Anthropology of Dance (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977).

[4]Frances P. Rust, Dance in Society (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 1.

dance in America, historically the roots of square dancing are in England, and this study is particularly germane to establishing its antecedents. In a brief article, "Role of Dance in Human Society," Waterman points out that dance can be seen as a form of communication among a group and that this communication can operate on several levels.[5] He focuses primarily on groups that he calls "primitive" and limits his discussion to an approach that sees dance as reinforcing cultural beliefs, either magico-religious or symbolic of the accepted relationships among group members.

Two collections of articles on dance ethnology that proved useful to my purposes are The Function of Dance in Human Society, edited by Boaz, and New Dimensions in Dance Research: Anthropology and Dance--The American Indian, edited by Comstock.[6] The first collection is the earliest I have found that attempts to examine dance from a functionalist perspective and is concerned with such exotic communities as tribal Africa, Bali and Haiti. It is historically important, but development of the functional theme is relatively immature compared to the more recent Anthropology and Dance--The American Indian. While a portion of this anthology is concerned specifically with American Indian dance, several more general articles by Hanna, Royce,

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[5]Richard A. Waterman, "Role of Dance in Human Society," in Focus on Dance II: An Interdisciplinary Search for Meaning in Movement, ed. Bettie Jane Wooten (Washington, D.C.: American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, 1962), pp. 47-55.

[6]Franziska Boaz, ed., The Function of Dance in Human Society (New York: The Boaz School, 1944) and Tamara Comstock, ed., New Dimensions in Dance Research: Anthropology and Dance--The American Indian, Committee on Research in Dance Research Annual 6 (New York: Committee on Research in Dance, 1974).

Kealiinohomoku and Merriam re-examine what Royce refers to as "choreology," the study of dance. Taken together, these papers explore the history of traditional dance studies, the current state of the field and methodological approaches currently in use.

Dance History Research: Perspectives from Related Arts and Disciplines, edited by Kealiinohomoku, is a collection of papers the purpose of which is to establish a comprehensive set of useful approaches to the study of dance, especially within a historical framework.[7] The methodologies of such fields as oral history, art history, and theatre history are examined for the perspective they can provide for dance historians. In my opinion, not enough attention is paid to studying dance events in context, as opposed to the reconstruction of historical dance forms. But the approach taken seems to have been a function of the interests of the particular authors who contributed articles. The apparent conclusions of this collection--as every good researcher would probably admit and then perhaps ignore--is that all avenues of exploration should be considered when attempting to study a complex problem and that various disciplines can provide additional approaches to the problem at hand.

In an attempt to ensure the comprehensive collection of primary information on traditional dance, several field and research guides have been published. These are based upon various perspectives on the importance of recording both the context of the dance event and the actual dance movement. They attempt to deal with the unresolved

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[7]Joann W. Kealiinohomoku, ed., Dance History Research: Perspectives from Related Arts and Disciplines, Committee on Research in Dance Research Annual 2 (New York: Committee on Research in Dance, 1969).

problems of recording dance events in their entire complexity and suggest various approaches to collecting useful information. They reflect the reality that to record movement in such a way that it can be reconstructed is nearly impossible, although several systems of symbolic movement notation have been developed; and movie, video and still photographic records are valuable tools in the attempt. Facility in notational systems requires specialized training and is not always among the skills of a particular researcher. Therefore, some field guides suggest using general verbal descriptions of particular dances instead of specialized systems. Despite their shortcomings, these guides were useful to me in ensuring that I not miss important aspects of the dance event complex in my research.

The Handbook of Irish Folklore, by Ó Súilleabháin, presents a detailed set of questions to be used in collecting information from oral sources and does not deal with a symbolic record of movement at all.[8] Kealiinohomoku, in "Field Guides," has prepared a check list for dance observation by field workers, including those who are not particularly dance oriented feeling that useful information can be collected in conjunction with other research projects.[9] Miller, in a "A Data Check-List for the Study of Ethnic Dance," deals primarily with the recording of movement and basically ignores the

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[8]Sean Ó Súilleabháin, Handbook of Irish Folklore (Dublin: Folklore of Ireland Society, 1942; reprint ed., London: Herbert Jenkins, 1963), pp. 688-90.

[9]Joann W. Kealiinohomoku, "Field Guides," in New Dimensions of Dance Research: Anthropology and Dance--The American Indian, ed. Tamara Comstock, Committee on Research in Dance Research Annual 6 (New York: Committee on Research in Dance, 1974), pp. 245-60.

context and social details of the performance.[10] Lomax, Bartenieff and Paulay, in their study of choreometrics (movement style), developed a general coding guide to provide descriptions of traditional dance forms in such a way that cross-cultural comparisons are possible. This system records a set of "motion qualities" of a gross nature, rather than specific descriptions of particular dances.[11] From this set of data they have attempted to correlate certain social characteristics and dance styles, but they are not concerned with contextual studies of dance as a social phenomenon.

A study by Cottle, a sociologist, "Social Class and Social Dancing," does provide contextual information and descriptions of social interactions at various sorts of social dances from the perspective of describing variations in these events as a function of the social classes of the participants. He also theorizes on the functions that dancing serves for the dancers, pointing out that "social dancing. . . is one form of intimate human interaction that sociologists have not yet fully examined."[12] Once again, this study does not deal with square dance events at all, although the perspective is a useful one for the study of social dance events in general.

Recently several folklorists have done studies of square dance

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[10]Hugh M. Miller, "A Data Check-List for the Study of Ethnic Dance," Ethnomusicology 8 (1964): 55-57.

[11]Alan Lomax, Irmgard Bartenieff and Forrestine Paulay, "Dance Style and Culture," in Folk Song Style and Culture, ed. Alan Lomax, American Association for the Advancement of Science Publication no. 88 (Washington, D.C.: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1968), pp. 222-47.

[12]Thomas J. Cottle, "Social Class and Social Dancing," The Sociological Quarterly 7 (1966): 179-96.

events that deal in a very particular way with only one type of event. These form the most important group of studies relevant to my thesis. Buckley, in "Honor Your Ladies: Folk Dance in the United States," gives a brief survey of traditional square dance events and examines regional variations in the formal nature of the actual dancing.[13] Winslow, in his dissertation, "The Rural Square Dance in the Northeastern United States: A Continuity of Tradition," describes and analyzes the rural square dance event primarily in New York and New England "in terms of ritual and custom from a folkloristic standpoint."[14] Much emphasis is placed upon both the setting of the dances and the social interactions that surround these events. Although this study focuses upon a different regional form of square dance event than does my thesis, the structure and methodology that it establishes provide a model and some useful comparative data. In "Old-Time Fiddling and Social Dance in Central St. Lawrence County" Bethke also deals with traditional dance events in New York State.[15] He explores the relationship between fiddle playing and dance events and examines both domestic and more public settings for these occasions and the changes over time in these traditions. He does not concern himself with dancing at all, but rather with the events. Burns and Mack, in "Social Symbolism

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[13]Bruce R. Buckley, "'Honor Your Ladies': Folk Dance in the United States," in Our Living Traditions: An Introduction to American Folklore, ed. Tristram P. Coffin (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1968), pp. 134-41.

[14]David J. Winslow, "The Rural Square Dance in the Northeastern United States: A Continuity of Tradition" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1972).

[15]Robert D. Bethke, "Old-Time Fiddling and Social Dance in Central St. Lawrence County," New York Folklore Quarterly 30 (September, 1964): 163-84.

in a Rural Square Dance Event," a study conducted at a Grange hall in western Pennsylvania, "deals with the behavior of a typical square dance event, and especially with the dancing behavior itself, . . .seek/ing/ to understand how the behavior of the square dance is socially meaningful as an expressive event to the community of dancers."[16] The perspective of the study is that the dances themselves are symbolically representative and re-enforcing of the social structure of the community of which the dancers are members. In order to set the stage for this symbolic analysis, the authors have provided both contextual material on the event and descriptions of the various distinct dances and the movements associated with these dances. This is the first study of its kind taking square dancing in the United States as its topic. It seeks to establish the functional role of these dance events on a subtle level not obvious at a superficial glance.

In an article I have found very helpful in the development of this study, Feintuch's "Dancing to the Music: Domestic Square Dances and Community in Southcentral Kentucky, ca. 1880-1940," the author examines square dancing in an area geographically and culturally closely related to Trigg County.[17] The focus of his study is primarily dances held in homes. Both description of the events and examination of the symbolic nature of the interactions taking place are presented. These dance events are closely related to those I am discussing, although

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[16]Thomas A. Burns and Doris Mack, "Social Symbolism in a Rural Square Dance Event" (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1979, typewritten).

[17]Burt Feintuch, "Dancing to the Music: Domestic Square Dances and Community in Southcentral Kentucky, ca. 1880-1940," Journal of the Folklore Institute 18 (1981): 49-68.

relatively minor local variations stand out in both the context and form of dancing. These variations are confirmed by several of my informants who can describe different ways of executing various movements in dances held as close together as adjacent counties.

Only two major studies of the play-party stand out among the available literature. Wolford's The Play-Party in Indiana is a collection of words and tunes to the party games with an introduction that provides a brief look at the context in which they were played, notes on other collections that include each game and a short essay on "Traces of British Influence in Play-Party Melodies."[18] A much more thorough collection of games, most of which were collected in Oklahoma, is Botkin's The American Play-Party Song.[19] The relationship between square dancing and playing party games is examined, and a great deal of background material is included. Appended to the main text are some transcripts of portions of interviews which provide information on the settings of these events and the interactions of the participants attending them.

In addition to works prepared by scholars and academicians, a large body of material pertaining to both square dances and play-parties has been produced by enthusiasts. These are generally either nostalgic and antiquarian looks at the past or collections of directions for

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[18]Leah J. Wolford, The Play-Party in Indiana, ed. W. Edson Richmond and William Tillson, Indiana Historical Society Publications 20, no. 2 (n.p.: Indiana Historical Society, 1917; reprint ed., Indianapolis: Indianapolis Historical Society, 1959).

[19]Benjamin A. Botkin, The American Play-Party Song, University Studies of the University of Nebraska 38, nos. 1-4 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1937; reprint ed., New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1963).

performing the activities. Most of the books of directions provide very little information on the context of the dance events, but a few, such as Smith and Hovey's Appalachian Square Dances and McDowell's Folk Dances of Tennessee (which is about play-parties) include an introduction with some contextual information.[20]

An extremely useful product of the antiquarian study of square dancing is Damon's The History of Square Dancing. This small book is the best available history of the dance form; it provides information on the origins of square dancing and on how the form has changed over time and space. Damon is careful not to attribute these dances to the peasants of England and then assume he has said all that is necessary. This history is well documented and begins with the publication of the first English dance book in 1651 and continues through the early twentieth century.[21] "Frolic: Social Dancing on the Southern Frontier," by Anderson, is in the same vein as Damon, being a compilation of brief descriptions of dance events in the frontier South collected from various newspapers and memoirs.[22] Through these a composite picture of the square dance events is presented in an article that, although not analytical, is indeed well documented.

In "Folk Dances of the United States: Regional Types and

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[20]Frank H. Smith and Rolf E. Hovey, The Appalachian Square Dance (Berea, Kentucky: Berea College, 1955) and Flora L. McDowell, Folk Dances of Tennessee (Delaware, Ohio: Cooperative Recreation Service, 1953).

[21]S. Foster Damon, The History of Square Dancing (Barre, Massachusetts: Barre Gazette, 1957).

[22]John Q. Anderson, "Frolic: Social Dancing on the Southern Frontier," Dance Magazine (October, 1956), pp. 15, 16, 83, 85, and (November, 1956), pp. 35, 80, 81.

Origins," Burchenal gives a brief overview of the origins of the various traditional dance forms of Anglo-Americans and then proceeds to classify them into four useful categories by dance form and the regions in which they are common.[23] She includes play-parties in her outline, as a distinctly related form of activity, but omits dance events initiated by revivalists which would muddy the historical distinctions among regional forms.

Taken as a group, this collection of books and articles does provide a certain amount of methodological and correlative material for my thesis. However, after a rather thorough search, I have found that the scarcity of studies involved with traditional Anglo-American dances and dance events apparently reflects a historical lack of interest in these phenomena among scholars. Although I cannot definitively explain this situation, I suggest that it has arisen because both anthropologists and folklorists, until fairly recently, seem to have been fascinated by studying both places and events that they considered to be exotic. This taste for the exotic meant that square dance events never caught the attention of persons interested in either dance ethnology, who preferred such locations as Bali or Africa, or persons interested in American community events, who preferred such activities as ecstatic religious services or Afro-American musical functions. Certainly this bias is changing, as is evidenced by articles that have appeared recently in folklore journals and by the formation of the Committee on Research in Dance, located at New York University.

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[23]Elizabeth Burchenal, "Folk Dance of the United States: Regional Types and Origins," Journal of the International Folk Music Council 3 (1951): 18-21.

The square dancing literature produced by enthusiasts, of which there has been much in the last fifty years, takes on an important function even within the academic study of dance, as it is often the only available information, and it is certainly not to be completely discounted as unreliable. It does tend to be incomplete in contextual information and therefore does not stand well by itself. Caution must be exercised in its use.

The obvious conclusion after surveying this body of literature is that more research on Anglo-American traditional dance forms and events is necessary to provide a more complete picture of the function of these events as settings for community social interaction. Despite the fact that square dances and dance events have changed considerably in the twentieth century from their earlier forms, it is apparent from the currently available studies that opportunities still exist for research on this subject. Such studies might use the methods of participant observation and historic re-creation through oral history. Not only will future studies add to an understanding of square dance events in context, but they will also add to the understanding of social events and the functions they serve in helping to encourage the continuity of communities.

CHAPTER III

DANCE EVENTS IN TRIGG COUNTY

Overview

Circumstantial evidence leads me to believe that the first settlers in Trigg County brought square dancing with them as a community entertainment and social event.[1] As early as 1802 it was possible to purchase a book of country dances in Nashville, Tennessee, a settlement upriver on the Cumberland from Trigg County and a stopping-off point for many of the earliest permanent residents of the county.[2] June Thomas, who was taken to Nashville as a child in 1804, remembered country dances that lasted all night. By the 1830s several dancing academies flourished in Nashville, and barbecues and dances were held regularly at the race course.[3]

The earliest mention that I have located of dancing in Trigg County is in the records of Donaldson Creek Baptist Church in the period before 1840, where censureship of members for dancing and playing

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[1] In 1780 this area of Kentucky was virtually uninhabited, yet by 1820, when the county was formed, the population was 3,874. (1820 census quoted in Hugh Thomas Edison, "The Thomas and Bridges Story, 1540-1840," September, 1971, The Kentucky Library, Manuscript SC 536, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, p. 22.)

[2] Tennessee Gazette, December 25, 1802 and April 13, 1803, quoted in Harriett Arnow, The Flowering of the Cumberland (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1963), p. 403.

[3] F. Garvin Davenport, Cultural Life in Nashville on the Eve of the Civil War (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941), p. 38.

the violin for dancing is entered.[4] Further evidence of the availability of music for dancing is provided by the journal entry of John Mabry in which he enumerates the estate of his son Jesse, who died in 1834. Included in the inventory is mention of a fiddle worth four dollars--a considerable sum at the time--which was eventually sold to David C. Mitchell.[5] In addition, during the first half of the eighteenth century W. S. Cory, a grocer in Wallonia, taught dancing in his home.[6]

Judging from Damon's The History of Square Dancing these early dances were likely to have been of several forms, including both country dances (as reflected today in the contra-dances of New England) in which the dancers faced each other in two long lines, and cotillions or quadrilles (as reflected in the squares still danced in many parts of the United States) in which four couples danced arranged in the form of a square. Calling the figures out to the dancers was not a part of the dancing until about 1812, so until that time it was necessary for the dancers to memorize the figures to each dance--thus the need for dancing masters, who could teach the dances, and books of dances to be used as reference works.[7]

While these dance forms were not identical with the circular sets

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[4]Edison, p. 34.

[5]John Mabry, "Journal," 1834, The Kentucky Library, Manuscript SC 652, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, pp. 3, 10.

[6]Historical Record Commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the Founding of Trigg County 1820-1970 (n.p.: n.p., 1970), p. 56.

[7]S. Foster Damon, The History of Square Dancing (Barre, Massachusetts: Barre Gazette, 1957), pp. 12-31.

described by Trigg Countians (for description see section on neighborhood dances) they are certainly their antecedents. The development of these circular sets--referred to in some of the dance literature as Big Circle Sets--is not clearly attributable to any particular time period.[8] Without attempting to reconstruct exact historical dance forms, several characteristics of the events are worthy of note, including the fact that the earliest dance music was provided by fiddlers, and at least one source includes banjos as being present.[9] A caller was also an integral part of the event for most of the nineteenth century. Arnow mentions that Virginia Reels (a dance form familiar to some of my informants) were danced in Nashville when it was still a fort.[10] Dick, in The Dixie Frontier, concludes that dances were the most popular pastime of the settlers, with the participants arriving early and staying late.[11] This fact is important in light of the mention by several of my informants that dance events were the only entertainments available to them, outside church events, when they were growing up in the early part of the twentieth century.

Whatever the relationship between the earliest dance events in Trigg County and those common during the period under discussion, there certainly is evidence of a historical precedent for community events

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[8]For example see Patrick E. Napier, Kentucky Mountain Square Dancing (n.p.: Patrick E. Napier, 1975), p. 3 and Frank E. Smith and Rolf E. Hovey, The Appalachian Square Dance (Berea, Kentucky: Berea College, 1955), p. 8.

[9]Everett Dick, The Dixie Frontier: A Social History of the Southern Frontier from the First Transmontane Beginnings to the Civil War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), p. 131.

[10]Arnow, p. 403.

[11]Dick, p. 131.

that included dancing. Most of the people whom I talked to in Trigg County had no idea where or when the dancing originated, although several did suggest that it had been going on since the first settlers arrived. A few people remembered their grandparents reminiscing about dance events held in their youth, which concretely dates the dances to about 1880.

Because the dances characteristically done locally throughout the twentieth century were in the form of circular sets, I inquired about the fact that these dances are referred to today as "square dances." I was told that years ago people only talked about "dancing" and meant what today is called "square dancing." While nobody could date the introduction of the term "square dancing" into the local vocabulary, it seems that the term was adopted to differentiate the old style of dancing from "round dancing," which meant dancing with your arms around your partner. "Round dancing," which might be referred to elsewhere as "social dancing," included waltzes and two-steps and later on the fox-trot. Sometimes in current usage it means any kind of dancing that is not square dancing, including the various forms of dancing to rock and roll music.

In the first half of the twentieth century four different dance event forms were common in Trigg County: neighborhood dances, picnics and barbecues, play-parties and public dances. These events differed in many ways, such as where they were held, how they were planned, who attended them, and who received remuneration for participation in the event. In order to set the stage for discussion of each form in particular, enumeration of some of the similarities and differences among them are in order.

Neighborhood dances were square dances held in homes, or occasionally in schoolhouses or outside, for the residents of a neighborhood. A neighborhood referred to residents of an area surrounding any home, the boundaries of which were defined by how far one could walk and therefore interact with a fair amount of frequency with a given set of people. A diagram of this arrangement might be a set of overlapping circles with each home at the center of a neighborhood. Neighbors were the people who traded at the same store, whose children attended the same school, and with whom daily interactions both in work and play were relatively frequent. Feintuch, in his study of domestic dances in southcentral Kentucky, describes a neighborhood as "a relationship of communication as /much as/ one of proximity; that neighbors could be 'counted on' and were available to help characterized their relations."[12]

Political boundaries were not important in defining neighborhoods, which crossed both the Kentucky-Tennessee state line at the southern edge of Trigg County and the Lyon-Trigg and Christian-Trigg county lines. This situation is still apparent today in that some of the southernmost residents of Trigg County, Kentucky, receive their mail at Bumpus Mills, Tennessee, although they vote and pay taxes in Kentucky. Some people participated in dance events on both sides of the Cumberland River, a natural division of the county. Full acceptance on both sides of the river was usually based upon family ties or having lived on both sides of the Cumberland. It was not that

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[12]Burt Feintuch, "Dancing to the Music: Domestic Square Dances and Community in Southcentral Kentucky, ca. 1880-1940," Journal of the Folklore Institute 18 (1981): 55.

people could not cross the river, but unless they felt themselves to be part of both communities, they usually did not, at least for social events.

These neighborhood dance events were planned by the person who hosted them. They set the date and made sure musicians were coming and then spread the information through informal channels. Although a family member might travel from house to house informing the neighborhood of the planned dance, more usually word was spread through contacts at the store, post office, school and work sites. The hosts received no money for their efforts, but the musicians were paid "on the corner," meaning that every time a couple danced the man paid the musicians a fixed rate, usually a nickel or dime. Non-dancers did not contribute financially to the event.

Neighborhood dances were held at least as much to provide a situation where neighbors could visit with each other in a relaxed, non-work setting as for dancing. Anyone who wanted to come was welcomed, including non-dancers, dancers, young, old, single and married. The dances performed were square dances and sometimes in later years waltzes and two-steps.

Play-party games seem to have arisen as a reaction to a ban on dancing based upon religious principles. Burchenal dates this ban to the Great Revival in Cane Ridge, Kentucky, in 1802. The accompaniment of a fiddle or other instrument defined dancing, so by moving through the figures to singing, an activity was a game, not a dance.[13]

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[13]Elizabeth Burchenal, "Folk Dance in the United States: Regional Types and Origins," Journal of the International Folk Music Council 3 (1951): 20.

Botkin, who claimed the play-party was a uniquely American invention, said that in many cases the play-party songs "consist of nothing more than dance calls affixed to jingles and formulae borrowed or adapted from traditional games, nursery rhymes, ballads and other folksongs, and popular songs."[14] Play-parties, which were in competition with dances, took on more features of the dances over time, but were kept alive in part by the church restrictions on dancing.[15] For a certain group of young people in the county these play-parties served the same function of providing a structured setting for socializing as dances did for a larger group whose membership overlapped in part with the party-goers.

Play-parties were also neighborhood events, organized and publicized by the hosts in similar fashion to neighborhood dances. However, instead of the primary activity being square dancing, it was playing "party games." These games were played by couples moving through figures to their own singing. Because there were no musicians needed, no one at a play-party received any monetary compensation for their participation. Anyone who wished to could attend a play-party, although they were held primarily for young people of about marriage age. Most of the participants were single, although married couples, before they had any children, might continue to attend. Younger siblings or older people sometimes accompanied the young women as chaperones, although generally speaking, they did not take part in the games.

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[14]Benjamin A. Botkin, The American Play-Party Song, University Studies of the University of Nebraska 38, nos. 1-4 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1937; reprint ed., New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1957), p. 5.

[15]Botkin, p. 18.

My informants explained the relationship between the actual square dances and play-party games specifically in Trigg County by describing the games as "square dances without music." Raymond Gibbs supported this statement by pointing out that the play-party "Leader Up and Down Roseybackalina" was the same as the square dance "Walk the Hall," and "Going Down to Rowser" was the same as "Cross Hands and Back."[16] Clarke and Clarke also point out that "In many communities a play party is a euphemism for dance, the latter term being frowned upon as sinful, whereas games at a party were acceptable for young folks, even though the activities are the same under either designation."[17]

Picnics and barbecues were generally held at a clearing in the woods and were events with two main activities; one of course was eating and the other was square dancing. These events, less frequent than neighborhood dances, drew participants from a larger area and tended to last all day and into the night, unlike dances and play-parties which took place for one night only. Picnics and barbecues were "got up" by word of mouth, and the announcement circulated through informal communication channels. Musicians were necessary for the dancing and were paid on the corner by each participating couple. Unlike neighborhood dances and play-parties, though, the sponsors of the event could make a profit through the sale of food to the attendees.

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[16]Interviews with Raymond Gibbs and Pauline Gibbs, Trigg County, Kentucky, 23 March 1979 and 16 November 1979.

[17]Kenneth Clarke and Mary Clarke, "Play Party," in A Concise Dictionary of Folklore, Kentucky Folklore Series 1 (Bowling Green: n.p., 1965), p. 26.

Non-dancers did not pay anything to attend the event, but they might spend money on refreshments. Socializing was an important dimension of this activity, and visiting among persons who did not see each other regularly was part of the attraction of picnics and barbecues.

Public dances were generally not neighborhood events, and persons interested in socializing with their neighbors and not in dancing were less likely to attend. These dances were held regularly on a calendar basis and, therefore, informal communication networks were not an important source of spreading news of the event. Public dances were held in public spaces such as restaurants and fraternal halls and not in private spaces such as homes. The sponsor of a public dance charged at the door for admission, so even non-dancers had to pay to attend. After paying any rental for space and a fixed sum to the band, the sponsor kept the remaining profits. This sum could by increased by the sale of refreshments to the participants.

Public dances were a later development in the continuum of dance events, in part because they required better modes of transportation and greater mobility in order to attract people. Because the events were less intimate and more likely to have strangers participating, some residents of Trigg County felt that the dances had an unsavory reputation which may not have been wholly undeserved. Peer pressure as a control on behavior did not work as well among strangers, and in later years, especially after the inception of Works Progress Administration and Tennessee Valley Authority projects in the area and the opening of Fort Campbell Army Base, this problem became serious and affected all the local dance event forms, especially public dances.

Technically speaking, all the various dance events were public. Anyone could attend. Several factors, however, influenced attendance at any given event. First and foremost was church membership. Many of the local churches had proscriptions against dancing, and church members were not supposed to attend square dances. I was told of several instances of people being "churched" for their misconduct. This reproach could range from being made to confess a transgression in front of the entire congregation to being removed from the church roles for continued bad behavior.

Because play-parties were not in the strictest sense dances, many people who attended them did not participate in square dances. Some of the strictest churchgoers, however, even forbade participation in play-parties. It was not uncommon for young people to slip away from home to attend dances or parties, but if they were caught the punishment could be severe. In some families it may have been that the parents felt they could not openly condone attendance at these affairs but at the same time they did not make an effort to catch their children participating. One informant explained that she would tell her parents she was spending the night with a girl friend so she could attend play-parties, and they never caught her in her deception.

Another factor influencing participation in dance events was parental discretion. Women especially told me that they were forbidden to attend square dances because their parents believed that the dances were too rowdy and because drinking was an integral part of the event.

A third factor affecting attendence at any specific event was

proximity. Many people could only attend events to which they could walk or at best ride a mule or horse or drive a wagon. Thus, transportation reduced the outside distance for reasonable travel to about six miles. However, some young men, especially, seemed very determined to participate. One informant told me of walking twelve miles to a dance and another recounted numerous incidents when he would strip off his clothes and swim the Cumberland River to have his chance at a good time. As better roads were constructed and automobiles became more common, this restriction on participation became a less important influence on attendance at dance events.

The financial resources of potential dancers also influenced participation. Since each time a couple danced the man had to pay the musicians, it was imperative that he have adequate funds. It was possible to spend a dollar or more in one night, which was beyond the means of some persons, especially during the twenties and thirties.

It was considered proper for young women to be chaperoned at any sort of dance or play-party. A younger sibling, one too young to be an active participant in the dancing or games, might be sent along to keep an eye on his or her sister. Or a parent might take his or her own daughters and perhaps those of a neighbor to these events. Frequently young people traveled to the dances in groups, and it was not usual for an unmarried couple to go to dances or parties alone.

Square dances and picnics and barbecues were family events. Young and old alike attended, whereas play-parties were more specifically for young people of courting age. Several people told me that they stopped attending any dance events during the time that they had small children since there were no babysitters for the youngsters.

On the other hand, some people brought their children to the family events and, if they were old enough, left them to entertain themselves. At house dances a bed in a back room was available to put the youngest children to sleep.

Dances and play-parties were sometimes attached to a gathering of neighbors to accomplish a specific task for one household such as hulling field peas or shelling corn. The dance or party was a reward for accomplishing the task at hand. One woman told me that the young people of her community begged to have a play-party and in return they had to cut wood for the host household.

Dance events were not the only social gatherings in Trigg County, although they seem to be the most important in people's memories, as evidenced by the number of times people would casually say that dance events were the only thing they had to do besides attend affairs sponsored by the churches. Upon further questioning people mentioned other social gatherings, including pie suppers, pound suppers, ice cream socials, musicals (gatherings of musicians to play) and "set around" parties (gatherings to play games that were not related to dancing and which had no musical accompaniment).

None of my informants connected any of the dance events with special holidays, although mention was made of a July Fourth barbecue. This fact does not mean that they were not held on holidays, but rather that they were not traditionally connected directly with them.

The similarities and differences in the four forms of dance events make it possible to examine them as seperate categories, although certain particular occaisions are not so easily placed in my scheme of description. Square dances were sometimes held out of doors

in semi-public spaces. For example, the communities of Tobaccoport, Linton, and Golden Pond all held dances outside in common areas that functioned in essence as neighborhood dances.

This general categorization and description of the dance event forms common in Trigg County present a general picture of the events in which area residents could participate. Each specific event varied in some small degree from the general descriptions I have provided. These variations were due to the influence of the particular host or sponsor. Events could vary in length, in the form and quantity of drinking allowed, and in the medthod of dealing with fights, if they developed.

The relationships of the various dance event forms as set out have begun to develop a picture of the entire spectrum of local dance events. The following sections, which focus attention on each event form in particular, elaborate on the different kinds of events.

Neighborhood Dances

Neighborhood dances were held frequently in this county before World War II and attending two or three in a week was not unusual. Commonly held indoors during the winter months when the farmers had less work and the small homes did not stifle the dancers and observers, an occaisional outdoor dance was planned during warmer weather. The events took place in one night and were often held on the weekends, although not exclusively so. The participants began to convene after supper, perhaps about seven o'clock, and the festivities could last until anywhere from eleven that night until well after sunrise the next day. The length of any given event seems to have been determined

in part by the feelings of the host and in part by the enthusiasm of the participants.

On any particular night more than one dance in the county was likely to be taking place, although in different neighborhoods. This situation created a demand for a large number of callers and musicians who could play well enough to accompany dancing. I was struck in the course of my research by the fact that nearly every man I spoke with could play at least one instrument, and many could play several (and I was not looking for musicians in particular). And nearly everyone interviewed named at least two or three additional musicians. Both calling and playing for dances was customarily done by men, although I was told that there were women who could both play and call if it was necessary. One woman did say that she played guitar regularly when her father was fiddling.

Usually a dance band consisted of at least a fiddler and banjo-player, and perhaps a guitarist. The bands were loose conglomerations of musicians, rather than rigidly fixed groups who always played together. The approach to providing the music was basically pragmatic and was based upon who was available and wanted to play. This flexibility was demonstrated by participation of an accordian player, a German man, who lived at Rockcastle. He learned fiddle tunes and played for some of the dances in the northern part of the county. Virtuosity as a musician was recognized but was not a major factor in playing for dancing. The only exception to the rigid racial segregation at neighborhood dances was the occaisional participation of a black fiddler as a member of the band.

As each couple paid the musicians on the corner, in an average evening during the twenties and thirties the band would usually make about five to eight dollars. This sum was then divided among the performers, so each person might make about a dollar and a half. While that was not a great deal of money, at a time and in a place where cash was difficult to come by and went far in purchasing power, it was not an insignificant sum. One musician pointed out that since the amount of money the band could make was dependent upon how many different dances they played for in an evening, it was important that each dance did not last too long. He added that each dance today lasts considerably longer than those of the past, since the band is paid a fixed sum for the whole event.

Callers were another necessary part of the dancing; and no matter how small a neighborhood dance was, there was always somebody taking this role. Sometimes the caller stood by the band, and sometimes he was an active dancer who called while he was participating. The caller was present to facilitate the orderly conduct of the dancing, but as part of the fun, some callers would occaisionally insert calls that did not fit the regular patterns familiar to the dancers. Some of the dancers would be listening and some would not, and the result was often a collision, an occurrence that was the source of a good laugh for everybody.

People would begin arriving for a dance, visiting with one another until there were enough dancers to begin dancing. To prepare for a house dance the participants would disassemble the beds and move them and the other furnishings out of the largest, usually the front, room of the house to make space. In order to have more room

for dancing the musicians played in a corner or in the doorway.

If the dance was to be held outside, a load of sawdust or bran (thus the name "bran dance" denoting an outside event) would be dumped on a level piece of ground to make more even and soft footing for dancing. A platform was built or a wagon turned upside down to provide a stage for the musicians.

The square dances were always for couples; thus, prior th each dance partners had to be chosen. It was proper for couples to be comprised of a man and a woman, and there were few exceptions to this rule. Anyone could dance with whomever he or she wanted, including married people. It was perfectly acceptable to dance with someone else's husband or wife. While it was most common for a man to invite a woman to be his partner, a woman could suggest to a man that she would like to dance with him.

At about the age of fifteen an adolescent became a full member of the group of dancers. A few precocious young people could dance well enough at twelve or fourteen to be accepted in the sets. Occasionally an older person might ask a pre-dancer to be his partner in order to teach the youngster the proper manner of dancing. There was no room in the dances for children who did not know how to dance and therefore were in the way. But the children, through years of contact and watching, absorbed the basic set of ideas that defined the dances, so when they were old enough to participate actively they were not wholly ignorant of proper dance decorum and the movements that constituted the dances.

The number of persons attending a neighborhood dance ranged from a few couples at a small house dance to a hundred or more at

the outdoor dances held in or near communities such as Golden Pond, Linton, Tobaccoport or Lafayette. The space in which the dancing took place determined how many couples could dance at one time. Eight couples was about the limit for a house dance, whereas quite a few more could participate if the dance was outside. When the number of dancers exceeded the amount of space, everyone took turns on the floor.

All the so-called "square dances" performed in Trigg County were actually in the form of a circle. At a house dance couples formed this circle and then one couple at a time would dance the figure of the dance with every other couple in turn. When the first couple completed the circle, the next couple would start making their way around, until every couple had their turn. At a larger dance more than one couple would start around the circle at the same time. All the figures danced in this county were really for two couples dancing with each other, except for the introductory and closing figures during which the entire circle danced. The waiting couples would stand and clap their hands or buck dance. For each separate dance the musicians played a different tune, and they played that same tune for the entire length of that dance.

While Burchenal points out that there is no known origin for this circular form of arranging couples for "square dancing," it seems to me that the circle is a logical outgrowth of the square.[18] Topographically there is little difference in the situation of four couples as a square or a small circle. And by envisioning the arrangement as

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[18]Burchenal, p. 20.

a circle, it becomes possible to accomodate any number of couples into the group, rather than requiring sets that are only multiples of four couples. In the interior spaces in which dancing occured, it was more pragmatic to allow for flexibility in the numbers that could be accomodated for a dance, as the space was never very large. When the dancing moved outdoors the circle was simply expanded to contain as many couples as wished to participate.

In addition to the organized, formulaic square dances the participants would also "buck dance." (This was also sometimes called "black-bottom dancing" or "jig dancing.") Buck dancing is a sort of free-form movement that does not necessarily require a partner and is perhaps most comparable, for those who have never seen it, to tap dancing. One person described it as using your feet to keep "in tune with the music." Another person called it "people doing their own thing." This expanded form of toe-tapping could be done while waiting one's turn during a regular set or while the band was playing but no square dance was in progress. Feintuch, in trying to explain the motivation for these solo displays and the enthusiasm sometimes inherent in them, says:

> the solo dance displays were indicative of a heightened intensity of musical affect in which a dancer would 'feel the music' in such a way as to have to resort to a special expressive outlet, a sort of display which disrupted the standard pattern of coupling. This sort of expressive 'outburst' might well be similar in some ways to possession, glossolalia, and other examples of intense expressive behavior in some sectarian contexts.[19]

While this rather strong statement may reflect the case under certain circumstances at the Trigg County dances, sometimes buck

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[19]Feintuch, p. 61.

dancing was merely a sort of pastime while waiting one's turn in a regular circular dance. It was a way to react to the music without disrupting the entire set. One man who lived near Empire Furnace described a more formal setting of buck dancing called "Kill the Coon," in which a visiting man would go around the circle to each lady and dance in front of her and then swing her. Sometimes the woman would dance, too. Each man would have a turn to show off his skill at the fancy stepping.

At some neighborhood dances, round dances such as the two-step and fox-trot were a part of the night's activity in addition to square dances. One musician and dancer felt that as early as the 1920s round dancing and popular music started coming into Trigg County. The local musicians would take such popular tunes as "Gonna See Momma Every Night" and "I Get the Blues When It Rains" and perform their own country versions of them for the dancers. Waltzes were also a popular form of round dancing, and such tunes as "Over the Waves" and "Beautiful Ohio" were in the repertoire of some of the musicians. They would sing and play these tunes between the square dances. In order to differentiate the popular dance tunes from the traditional ones, the old-time fiddle tunes were referred to as "hoedown music."

Not everyone who attended a neighborhood dance event was interested in participating in the dancing. Some people came to visit with each other and to watch the dancers and enjoy the music. Several of my informants pointed out that some people wanted to dance every dance and could keep going at it all night long. One person, who knew how to call the dances, told me he preferred not to, so he could concentrate on dancing. These ardent dancers also attended every dance

they possibly could. Other people would dance occaisionally but were present at the events as much for the socializing as for the dancing.

After every three dances the band would usually take a short break, which gave even very active dancers a chance to socialize. But unlike the New England square dances described by Winslow, there was rarely a time at these events when people would take a break to eat.[20] The people who attended neighborhood dances did not bring a contribution of food with them, nor was the hostess expected to serve her guests. On a rare occaision the host household might provide coffee or sandwiches, but it was not a customary part of the event, as contrasted to New England where the ritual of eating was as important to the dance events as dancing. The only exception to this practice would be those times when either the dancing lasted all night or when some of the participants stayed over at the home hosting the dance. In these cases breakfast was served to those still present at the appropriate time.

Drinking whiskey, on the other hand, was an integral part of the behavior of the men at square dances. Generally speaking, when the band took a break, the men would convene outside the house or off to one side, if the dance was outdoors, to have a drink together. The liquor consumed was almost always homemade corn whiskey, and each man brought his own to the dance. During the Depression, especially, the area of Trigg County between the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers was

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[20]David John Winslow, "The Rural Square Dance in the Northeastern United States: A Continuity of Tradition" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1972).

nationally known as a center of moonshining, and this situation indicates how much a part of life alcohol was. This activity was strictly the province of the male members of the community, and a woman was rarely seen taking a drink in public. Although the drinking was usually off to the side of the space set aside for the dance event, one informant told me of a dance at a home at Pleasant Hill, a community between the rivers, where the host placed a keg of whiskey and a dipper on the kitchen table so his guests could help themselves. In order to make sure no one got too drunk, a man was appointed to oversee behavior. According to my informant, one of his buddies did get out of hand, the overseer knocked him out and locked him in the hen house until he sobered up.

Many of my informants felt that drinking was not as much a problem in the past as it is today; men drank, and perhaps drank in large quantities, but consensus was that they did not get as drunk as they do now. At the same time, I heard many stories about fights at neighborhood dances, and in some cases, the stories of violent behavior had an obvious undertone of pride. The fights seem to be attributed basically to "meanness," a trait frequently accentuated by drinking. The fights were often motivated by slights or supposed slights made about a man's relationship with a woman, or amoung unmarried men it was sometimes competition for the right to court a particular girl. And sometimes there just was no apparent reason. While most of the fighting was with fists, guns and knives were also wielded in the fray. One informant said, "People used to carry guns to dances. You could hear them pop every once in a while--people shooting at random. They carried guns so they wouldn't take

no foolishness."[21]

I heard tales of particular knife fights from two people that were memorable for the fact that in each case a seriously injured man survived the affair. In one, a man's abdomen was cut open and he ran into the brush and fell over. The local country doctor was summoned, who just picked up the man's entrails, replaced them and sewed him up. Much to everyone's surprise the victim survived and lived until a few years ago. The other fight involved a man cutting off a piece of another's liver, and again the victim survived, although minus a portion of his liver.

Whatever the rowdy behavior at neighborhood dances, it was controlled as best it could be by the people in attendance. No outside law enforcement personnel were present. While the events did get rather out of hand on some occasions, it seemed, since each person was well acquainted with the other, peer pressure was adequate to keep violence within manageable bounds most of the time.

Because drinking was strictly a male province and took place on the sidelines of the main event area, much of the socializing at neighborhood dance events was segregated along sexual lines. There was also separation between age groups. Not surprisingly, the concerns of each group were particular to it, which reinforced the different clusters of participants. The groups that stood out in my interviews were babies, children, unmarried women, unmarried men, married women and married men.

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[21]Interview with John (Dick) Bryant, Trigg County, Kentucky, 30 March 1979.

Babies were the children who were young enough to be put to sleep on a bed in a back room for the course of the dance event. Children, those of the ages between babies and courtship, were left to occupy themselves and were generally ignored by the adults unless they were misbehaving. They were not active participants in the dancing.

Unmarried men and women were old enough to be members of the set of dancers and to begin being concerned about courtship and marriage. Several informants considered them to be the core group of dancers. The women, who were referred to as "girls" before they married, were preoccupied with the young men and that was often the topic of their conversation. One informant said the girls whispered and giggled among themselves, which was perhaps a reflection of their anxieties about establishing relationships with men. Sometimes, as a group, the young women were responsible for the planning of dance events.

The unmarried men tended to form a group that interacted with the young women. They would retire from the scene of the dancing to have a drink together and would tease each other about their relationships with the girls.

During the time that a newly married couple did not have any children, they would interact with both the groups of single men and women and the groups of those who were married. The newlyweds' concerns lay between those of courting age and those who were occupied raising a family. The division between the married men and women was an outgrowth of the differing concerns of these groups in everyday life. Women were responsible for such domestic issues as the

home and children while men were concerned with such non-domestic issues as making a living and hunting and fishing. At the dance events the separation of these two groups was visually and symbolically emphasized by the men congregating outside the center of activity, while the women stayed inside the house or main event area to talk.

A special form of socializing that was an important dimension of neighborhood dance events was courting among the single people of marriageable age. While the main evening event was in progress, the extent of the courting behavior consisted only of the attention that a young man and woman paid each other. But if a young man was interested in a particular young woman, he would ask permission to walk her home. One informant described the courting as "You slip around and swap a little slobber every once in a while."[22] More seriously, the only chance a young man and woman had to be alone was on the way home, and that was usually only to a certain degree. If the girl's parents were also at the dance, the young couple would walk home in front of them, but the parents kept them within the circle of their lantern light. Sometimes a group of young people would walk home together. The daughter of one of my informants who happened to stop by during an interview explained how the young people took advantage of the walk home: "One couple would walk one home and then get them home. The others would be scared to go back by theirselves and they'd walk each other home all night long. That's a good excuse. That's

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[22]Bryant.

as bad as having a flat tire now."[23] Another way to ensure that the young people stayed out of trouble was to send along a younger sibling of the woman. One interviewee said, "Now I had two sisters was older than I am and they had, to have mother let them go, I had to go with them, you see. And they could have boyfriends walk them back home. But they trusted me to see after them."[24] A younger sister's presence was certainly not conducive to unacceptable behavior, since the tale would no doubt be carried home to parents.

Courting was an acknowledged activity within the context of the dance events, but the behavior of the young people was controlled by community practice. A courting couple was never allowed to be completely alone, thereby ensuring that no one got into trouble or crossed the bounds of sanctioned behavior. The structure of the dance event allowed a certain amount of experimentation on the part of the courters, and at the same time ensured that these interactions would not extend beyond the point considered appropriate by community standards. Yet, within these bounds, several of my informants said they had a good time walking home, and one person pointed out that there was a certain amount of hugging and kissing that took place.

Neighborhood dances ended when the musicians and participants were tired. After the dancing was over, people stood around and talked and laughed for a few minutes and perhaps planned another event before everyone left. The musicians did not stay and play once the dancing was over. Before the event broke up completely the participants

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[23]Gibbs and Gibbs, 16 November 1979.

[24]Gibbs and Gibbs, 16 November 1979.

reassembled the beds and returned them and the other furnishings to their proper places in the room in which the dancing had taken place. Usually everyone went home, because most of the homes were too small to accomodate extra guests overnight. However, two people talked about dances at their homes at which some of the participants would stay over and eat breakfast the next morning. One of these homes had a large smokehouse in which was placed three old beds right next to each other. By morning the beds would be full, and the hostess had to come and inquire how many people she was to fix breakfast for.

Another reason for not staying over at the house holding the dance was that most of the participants lived on farms, and there were morning chores to be done. If a man travelled far enough to a dance, he might not arrive home until it was chore time, in which case he went directly to work without any sleep. In later years, the men who held "public jobs" (any job for pay except farm work) would have to be at work in the morning.

Neighborhood dances were events made up of different complexes of behavior. Each person attending was a participant in one or more of these complexes, including talking and visiting with one's neighbors, watching the dancing and listening to the music, dancing, playing music, calling the dances, drinking, fighting and courting. These behaviors were customary within the community of people who attended dances and each dance event was basically of the same form.

The importance of the neighborhood dances as settings for community social interactons should not be underestimated. They presented an opportunity for neighborhood residents to interact as individuals, groups of men and women, family groups and as a neighborhood.

The social activity helped define, clarify, strengthen and reinforce the ties that bound an entire network of relationships between individuals and groups. Dance events before World War II were not competing with many other forms of entertainment or social events and therefore were quite important in ensuring the continuity of the social structure as it existed and functioned. The strength of dance events as social interactive settings is reflected in the statements by my informants testifying that there was little else to do. And this strength was founded in part upon the fact that square dances were fun. People participated because they had a good time, and therefore the events added to their lives. Participation made people feel good, a strong force in ensuring the continuity of both the dance events as social gatherings and the community as a social entity within which they took place.

Play-Parties

When examined as entire events, play-parties were in many respects identical to neighborhood dances, while on a more specific level there were differences in who attended, the activities that took place in the course of the event and the relationship of drinking to the affair. While "play-party games" were not dancing, the play-party as a community event was a form of social gathering paralleling neighborhood dances. Play-parties filled a niche nearly identical to neighborhood dances for a certain group of young persons who were forbidden by their churches, and perhaps their parents, from square dancing and attendence at square dance events.

Unlike neighborhood dances, which were family oriented,

play-parties were more particularly for people of courting age. While the parties were "got up" and word spread of the plans in the same fashion as square dances, it was usually a group of young people who planned the event and made arrangements with some homeowner for the use of a house in which to hold the affair. Sometimes in exchange for the privilege of holding the event, the party-goers would have to perform a task for the host such as cutting wood or hulling peas. Consensus was that the adults were fairly generous about hosting the parties, which took place primarily in the winter, when there was less work for area residents.

Play-parties were among the few regularly held social activities, outside of church, at which young people who did not dance had a chance to interact with members of the opposite sex and to begin to form relationships. This was particularly important at a time when many persons stopped attending school before they approached the age of marriage. As a consequence, the desire to attend and participate in the parties could be very strong and could override other responsibilities. Stanley Boren, referring to the 1930s, told me:

> And I remember one time I came in from work and mother--I laid up on the couch. And my mother said, "Well, get over here and study your Sunday school lesson now." And I said, "I'm too tired." Two girls come up, they done had cars. Them two girls come up and got me and said, "You going to the play-party?" And I said I didn't know anything about it. One said, "There's one over at Mr. Taylor's." So I got up and went with them. . . . And my mother said, "Yeah, you're too tired to study your Sunday school lessons, but you can go out to a play-party til eleven o'clock.[25]

It was usual to travel two or three miles to a party, but sometimes the enthusiasm of potential participants caused them to travel

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[25]Interview with William (Stanley) Boren and Frank Boren, Trigg County, Kentucky, 17 November 1979.

much farther. In fact, one time a couple of boys walked twenty-five miles in order to take part in a play-party. Because the parties fundamentally served a relatively limited geographical area, on a particular night, especially on the weekends, several affairs would be taking place scattered throughout the county.

In addition to the prohibition of dancing at the parties, these events were in general more decorous and reserved than the neighborhood dances. One manifestation of this attitude was that drinking was discouraged, and in some cases, absolutely forbidden. One woman said that if her father smelled liquor on any man attending a play-party at her home, he was immediately asked to leave. If he did not leave peacefully, he was forced to depart. Some of the men whom I talked to felt that as long as the drinking was surreptitious and not excessive it was not an issue at the parties that they attended.

Play-parties were neighborhood events. While technically anyone could come, some attempts were made to keep the events secret from those persons who were known rowdies and heavy drinkers, especially since they tended to be the persons involved in fights. If word did get out and these undesirables appeared, they were allowed to participate because including them usually caused less trouble than attempting to get them to leave. But on occasion parties were completely disrupted by the wilder young men in attendance, and the fights seemed to have been based upon the same issues as those at the dances.

The young people who attended play-parties were divided into two groups: those who were also allowed to participate in square

dances, and those who were not. Obviously, for those who did not dance, the play-parties were a larger part of their social lives and served the same function of providing a structured setting in which to interact with members of the opposite sex as did neighborhood dances for the other group. Just as at the neighborhood dances, young women were usually chaperoned at the parties by either an older adult or sibling too young to be an active participant in the games.

The party games usually took place in the largest room of the host house. The adults who were present as chaperones would gather in another room to visit for the evening, although once in a while someone would watch the young people and, though rarely, even participate in a game. One informant told of an old man who would sometimes play, and if he thought the game was not progressing properly he would stop the activity and stand there and "cuss."

When enough young people were present for the games to start, one person would suggest a "play" and the group would go through that game. Usually there was a lead couple who started, and in many games the man changed partners each time through. The group would move through the figures until each man had his original partner back, which signaled the end of that game. Someone would then suggest another play and the evening would progress with one game after another, with perhaps up to a dozen couples participating. After every few games the players would take a short break to catch their breaths and socialize.

Just as in the square dances, the party games were predicated on a couple arrangement of the players, usually organized in a circle. Most of the time the men would ask the women to play, and the couples

consisted of a man and a woman. Especially among the younger participants (thirteen or fourteen years old) there were some people who were very shy about taking part. One man, who seemed particularly sensitive, said that he always made an effort in the course of the night to ask the girls who were left out to play with him. Young married couples sometimes continued to attend until they had children, and it was considered acceptable for them to play with persons other than their spouses.

While my informants seemed to agree that play-party games were the same as "square dances without music," the relationship between the members of each couple was slightly different than in the dances. In the square dances each couple stayed together as a pair for the entire dance, although interacting at times with the members of another couple. In most of the party games each man changed partners every time through, until he had had each woman as a partner. In some of the games an extra man was included, and at some point he would have a chance to grab a partner for himself, leaving a new man as the odd person. The figures through which the players moved were frequently drawn from the body of square dance figures, and several persons could clearly equate the movements of some dances with equivalent games.

The play-party games were done to the singing of the participants. Each game had its own particular song, which often combined bits of words to fiddle tunes, nonsense, and directions for the players. As an example of the words to a game, Frank and William (Stanley) Boren sang me "Swing Old Betty":

Frank and Stanley: Going away to marry,
My true love by my side.

Swing old Betty bye and bye.
All night long.
All the way around.
Swing old Betty.

Kill yourself, Mama ain't here.
Kill yourself, Papa don't care.

Swing old Betty bye and bye.
All night long.
All the way around.

Stanley:	Swing old Betty.	Frank:	Bye and a bye.
	All night long.		Bye and a bye.
	All the way around.		Bye and a bye.
	Swing old Betty.		Bye and a bye.[26]

Various informants estimated the repertoire of the group as consisting of anywhere from ten to twenty games. The games best liked were sometimes played two or three times in a night.

In contrast to the square dances in which a caller directed the movements of the participants, it was necessary for the game players to have a full knowledge of the figures employed in each game. While there was no formal leader in the games, usually someone who was a good singer and player acted informally in that role, organizing the group for each game. Some children were exposed to these games by being present at play-parties held in their homes. By the time they were of age to participate, they were familiar with the activities. In addition, the games could be learned by observation when young people first began to attend the events. The first few times that a person was present it was not unusual for him or her to be a player in only a few games during the night, giving him or her a chance to

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[26]Boren and Boren.

become acquainted with the progression of each play.

People began to gather for the play-party after supper. The event lasted until about eleven o'clock. Usually, the participants were not served refreshments in the course of the night, nor were they expected to bring food with them. The event was over when the participants were tired or when they or their host decided the hour was getting late. Participants did not linger at the host's house after they had replaced any furnishings that were moved for the party. It was unusual to stay overnight at the home hosting the party; and the only exception to this practice, that I am aware of, was that cousins would visit each other and stay for a week or two. This was not an unusual case, as many families had relatives living fairly short distances away.

Courting was an important part of the play-parties. In the same fashion as at dances, a young man could ask a girl whom he favored if he could have the privilege of walking her home. The parties provided little opportunity for a couple to be alone, but the walk home gave them time to focus their attention on each other. Whoever acted as chaperone for the woman would walk along, an active check on unacceptable behavior.

Unlike the neighborhood dance events, the number of groups taking part in the entire play-party event was quite limited. Primarily, the active participants consisted of young men and women who were approaching the age of marriage, with a few married couples who had not yet become completely separated from the unmarried by having children. The parties provided a chance to socialize and to get to know other young people within a setting that provided a good time,

reinforced community values and mores and included built-in checks against behavior considered inappropriate. Peripheral participants were also present, consisting primarily of a group of adults and sometimes younger siblings who did not take part in the central acitivity of the event, playing party games.

Because no musicians or callers were necessary to the party games, these groups were entirely absent from these events. As a consequence, no money changed hands, because the players provided their own accompaniment. One man pointed out that you had to have money to attend a dance, perhaps as much as a dollar for the night, whereas there was no cost at all to the participants at a play-party. The majority of the players being unmarried, the only babies or children likely to be present at a party were those of the family whose home hosted the event. And although there was no formal restriction against their attendance, married people with families usually did not take part in the parties.

Because of the limited group of participants, play-parties were more clearly and directly related to courting among eligible persons than were neighborhood dances. Especially for those young people who were restricted from participation in square dances, these events served the important function of providing a setting for courtship, an activity that helped ensure the stability and permanence of the community.

When compared with neighborhood dance events, from a structural perspective, the play-parties progressed and functioned in much the same way as events. They were organized and advertised in a similar

fashion and took place in the same private space of a neighbor's home. The event took place entirely in one night and included both an active group who took part in the playing and a peripheral group who socialized on the fringes of the central activity area. The ending of the event was decided in the same way by the participants and host and the same courting behavior on the walk home was an integral part of the event for appropriate persons. In support of the idea that play-parties were in some ways, at least, equivalent to dances in the local taxonomy is the often repeated explanation that play-parties were square dances without music.

But looked at more minutely, the play-parties served a much smaller and more focused population than the neighborhood dances. Although no expressed rules existed limiting attendance at the parties to only those people eligible or nearly eligible for marriage, it was understood that they were the group most interested in the events. And unlike dances, drinking and fighting were only a minimal part of the events, resulting in a more controlled and reserved night's gathering.

Picnics and Barbecues

Picnics and barbecues were different from both play-parties and neighborhood dances because they encompassed two equally important activities, eating and dancing. In addition to including eating as a part of the event, picnics and barbecues differed in other ways from the events held in private homes. An important difference was the fact that these events were run by promoters for profit. By selling refreshments or meals to the participants at the events, the promoter

stood to make a small sum for himself, unlike the household dances were the host received no monetary compensation for his role. Other differences between the neighborhood events and picnics and barbecues included the spaces in which they took place, who attended, and the length of the events.

Both picnics and barbecues were all-day affairs for the participants. At picnics, the people who attended carried the main portion of their supper with them, which could then be supplemented through the purchase of lemonade, Coca-Cola and perhaps homemade ice cream from a stand operated by the promoter. Barbecues, on the other hand, provided the opportunity to purchase an entire supper at the site, of which the mainstay was some type of barbecued meat, usually pork. Not only were sandwiches sold, but the meat was available by the pound to take home. The sale of food was not restricted to just the persons who were active participants in the square dancing, and the promoter might show a profit of as much as six or eight dollars for the night, a considerable sum in the local economy during the 1920s and 1930s.

In preparation for the event the promoter would first choose a site at which to hold the affair, this usually being a clearing in the woods. This site was not private in the same sense that the interior space of a home was, and the attendees were not within the same sort of special relationship with the promoter as they were if they were inside the home of the host of a neighborhood event. For lack of a better descriptive term, I have chosen to label this space as semi-private, to differentiate it from the private space of a home.

A load of sawdust or bran was hauled to the event site and

spread on a level piece of ground to provide better footing for the dancers. A stand from which to sell food was usually constructed, and arrangements were made for a bandstand, either by turning over a wagon or by building a structure.

Word of the event was spread through informal channels, and just as at neighborhood dances, many people attended for the socializing in addition to, or in spite of, the square dancing. The participants tended to come from a larger area than they would for neighborhood dances both because these events were less frequent and because they provided an opportunity to interact with a larger group. Entire families attended these outdoor events. There was more justification for the extra effort expended in traveling the longer distance, since the events lasted all afternoon and into the night.

Both picnics and barbecues were events that depended upon good weather, so they took place primarily during the summer. While they seem to have occurred mostly at the whim of the promoters, mention was made several times of a July Fourth barbecue. It does not seem to be the case that the event was considered absolutely necessary to celebrate the holiday, since my informants generally claimed that there were no special times when the events took place regularly.

For picnics, all the necessary preparations could be accomplished on the day of the event. However, barbecues began the night before for the promoter, a head cook and a few assistants in order to properly prepare and cook the barbecued meat. A pit was dug and wire screening set over the fire. The meat was placed on the screen, and through the night the head cook, always a man, and his assistants, also male, took turns tending the flames and mopping the meat with

barbecue sauce. One informant described the sauce as "red hot, so hot you could hardly eat it."[27] The art of preparing the barbecue was a recognized skill and the responsibilities of the head cook were a very serious matter. One of the few exceptions to rigid community segregation by race, the role of the cook was often filled by a black man. The restaurant at Pete Light Springs, which for many years sponsored a barbecue and dance event, always had the same black man as the cook who came and worked especially for those affairs.

People would gather early in the afternoon for both picnics and barbecues. There was square dancing in the afternoon, then a break for supper, with the dancing resuming after the meal and continuing into the night. The promoter made arrangements for a square dance band and caller to be present. The band and caller were paid on the corner, just as at a neighborhood dance. The dancing was identical in form to that at the square dances held in homes, except a larger number of dancers could be accomodated at the same time thanks to the nearly unlimited amount of space.

At some of the outdoor events black residents of the county were present. Although they did not really interact with the white participants, they would sometimes take turns dancing to the band. While the dancing was in progress, the members of differenct races did not interact, so the dancers were either all black or all white. Thus picnics and barbecues were the only dance events in which both black and white participants were involved, although in many respects they were not interacting with each other.

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[27] Bryant.

Drinking and courting were both activities that took place at the picnics and barbecues in much the same way as they occurred at the neighborhood dances. Fights were also likely to occur. Without repeating the details of these behaviors, suffice it to say that in many respects the picnics and barbecues served the same community social functions as neighborhood dances, albeit in a different setting and with several additional elements in the structure of the events. The groups involved in the events were equal to those participating in the neighborhood dances, with the possible addition of black participants, and at barbecues, a head cook and his crew.

Although several of my informants had attended a large number of picnics and barbecues before World War II, other people told me that by the time they were adults, these events were declining in popularity and frequency. In fact, some people only knew of them through stories that their parents told. While I did not have a large enough sampling of informants to pinpoint the geographical distribution of the picnics and barbecues within the experience of people still living, it may be that certain parts of the county were more tenacious in holding on to customary events. This may have been particularly true of the area between the rivers. And a few years age difference among the people that I spoke with might be enough to account for this difference in experience, since so many major changes in the community social life took place around the time of World War II.

In many respects picnics and barbecues filled a similar niche in the social lives of the residents of Trigg County as did neighborhood dances, especially since the two types of events occurred at

different times of the year. Yet the outdoor events had additional elements making them somewhat broader in scope.

Public Dances and the Decline of Neighborhood Events

Public dances were a relatively recent innovation within the complex of dance events in Trigg County and were the only form whose origin in time can be pinpointed. Generically related to both neighborhood dances and picnics and barbecues, public dances evolved to suit changing local conditions in a way that incorporated elements of the older dance event forms.

The Depression and World War II comprised a period of tremendous social change in this area. During the 1930s and 1940s Trigg County underwent development that changed the local social structure from that of a basically nineteenth century rural region to a more modern twentieth century form. The advent of Works Progess Administration projects was the earliest step in these changes. Until this public improvement program, roads in Trigg County were generally quite primitive, and travel across both the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers was dependent upon privately operated ferry boats. In the 1930s bridges were built spanning both rivers, and roads were improved in many portions of the county. These projects not only eased transportation problems, but they also introduced what is referred to locally as "public jobs" into the local economy. For the first time work was available at jobs other than farming, which paid relatively high cash wages. This increase in income allowed many men to purchase automobiles or trucks and thereby allowed the possibility of taking advantage of the improved roads.

About this same time three major projects commenced within Trigg County. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began to construct a large dam at Gilbertsville, on the Tennessee River, for power generation and flood control purposes. This project provided additional jobs for local residents and brought more cash into the local economy. When completed, the dam backed up water into the newly formed Kentucky Lake on the western edge of the county. This flooding displaced some residents of the land between the rivers, disturbing the social network for neighbors in that area. About the same time, the U.S. Army purchased some 22,000 acres of land in the southeastern portion of the county as part of the newly constructed Fort Campbell Army Base, displacing additional long-time residents and further disturbing the established social structure. An additional 26,000 acres between the rivers was acquired by the State of Kentucky for development as a wildlife refuge and area for sportsmen.

One effect on the local social structure of this tremendous amount of development and displacement was to introduce new elements into the complex of traditional activities. Within the day-to-day existence of many Trigg Countians, men, especially, began to work farther from their homes and for the first time had regular public jobs that provided them with cash money on a continuing basis. For the people living in rural neighborhoods, these were no longer the center of all activities, and people were interacting with a larger number of persons over a larger geographic area. For the first time, also, these projects brought in officials and workers from outside the locality who carried with them new ideas and slightly different ways of going about daily activities. They also

brought new ideas about recreation and entertainment. One direct result of these population movements was the consolidation of the county schools in the 1930s. This new educational structure helped to break down the importance of neighborhoods even further, and young people began to know and interact with persons from all over the county.

When World War II broke out, the disruption of the traditional lifestyle was increased further. Young men were drafted and left the area and were thus exposed to many new ideas. And as cash money became more desirable and necessary, young men, and sometimes entire families, left Trigg County to move to urban areas such as Indianapolis and Detroit in search of industrial jobs. Some of these people never returned and some came home on leave or vacations, eventually returning to live in Trigg County.

This reorganization of daily living affected many aspects of the local lifestyle, including neighborhood dances, play-parties and picnics and barbecues. Nearly everyone I spoke with pinpointed World War II as the time of the demise of these traditional dance event forms. Most people felt that interest in the dances diminished and that they petered out from lack of attention. One person said that after he was drafted during the War, play-parties were no longer held with much frequency. Sometimes they were got up when the young men were home on leave from the army, and the last play-party that he knew about was held under those circumstances.

These dance events were subject to the same pressures as other traditional local pastimes; and while the war was certainly an integral part of their demise, I believe that other factors were also

at work. The fact that both neighborhood dances and play-parties were held in the private space of individual homes may have become a problem when attendance at the events was no longer limited by necessity to neighborhood residents. The houses were not large and just the possible increase in the number of participants would have made it less attractive for homeowners to host a dance or play-party. But even more important, behavior of the participants at these events had been traditionally controlled by peer pressure--a method that worked considerable less well when strangers who were not a part of the local social network and subject to the built-in values thereof were in attendance. It may have been acceptable to force compliance to behavioral standards through peer pressure, but when persons, especially single young men, were present who had no vested interest in complying, this method did not work nearly as well. And to have a disturbance that could not be easily defused develop in a private home must have been unnerving for the host of the event. And as transportation became easier, it was possible for more people to be present at these events, both residents from the entire county and outsiders who had come there as a result of the projects under development.

Another change that may have affected the local structure of dance events was the new kind of jobs held by many area residents. Public jobs demanded a stricter adherence to a time structure than farm work, and people could not as easily accomodate themselves to the old informal method of getting up dance events. There was also more money in the local economy, and travel was easier, so dance events had more competition from new forms of entertainment such

as movies and eating in restaurants, and, later on, stage shows at country music barns and television.

While picnics and barbecues may have begun to decline in popularity even before the 1930s, one major impetus behind them, the possibility of a monetary profit for the promoter, became less important as new ways of having a cash income became accessible. And again, peer pressure control of unacceptable behavior was more problematic when a large number of strangers were present at a given event.

It is not quite clear whether there was a brief period when virtually no dance events of any kind were held in Trigg County or whether the demise of the older event forms overlapped with the development of the public dance. But by the late 1940s or early 1950s this new form was well established locally.

Public dances evolved from a combination of characteristics of both the neighborhood dances and picnics and barbecues, but were structured in a new way to meet changed conditions in the local social structure. Public dances were held in public spaces which eliminated the problems of holding events in private homes. The locations of these public dances that I am aware of in Trigg County were Fort Campbell Army Base (which was also partly in Christian County), Pete Light Springs Restaurant, the American Legion Hall in Cadiz and Gibbs Community Center. All these places were larger than private homes and could accomodate larger crowds, a necessity in view of the fact that attendance at public dances ranged anywhere from two hundred to seven hundred people. Larger spaces also removed any problems that might develop from intruding on an individual's

home, his private space.

Public dances required a promoter, as did picnics and barbecues. And in the same way, the promoter stood to make a financial profit from the event. He was responsible for arranging for a space, either by owning it or renting it. He also arranged for a band and caller to be present. Refreshments were sold at public dances, and the promoter made arrangements for the concession, which remained under his control. Everyone who attended a public dance, whether an active participant in the dancing or not, paid an admission charge of some amount set by the promoter. After all expenses were paid, the remaining sum was profit. The financial obligations of the promoter included rental of space (if appropriate), a fixed sum for the entire event to the band and caller, and the initial cost of the refreshments.

Unlike the older dance event forms, public dances were scheduled regularly by the calender, not at the whim of the host or promoter. Word of mouth information was no longer critical to the success of the affair, since anyone who was interested knew exactly when and where the dances would take place. The length of the events was standardized also, with midnight usually being the ending time. The dances took place year-round, although during the hottest summer months it might be so hot that the dancing was minimal or even cancelled temporarily.

Public dances drew participants from a much larger area than a neighborhood event. In fact, people would often come from other counties to attend, and residents of Trigg County attended dances at Princeton in Caldwell County, Dawson Springs in Hopkins County and Hopkinsville in Christian County. The dance events no longer

served as community social events that drew neighbors together to visit with each other and dance. Instead, the events became more anonymous, and the dancing became a more important attraction to the participants. It was still likely that anyone attending a public dance would know quite a few of the people present, but undoubtedly there would also be a fair number of total strangers. At a neighborhood dance everyone most likely knew everyone else present and also knew their families and had a general idea of the state of their affairs. This intimacy was lacking at the public dances, and, therefore, persons interested in a social event with their neighbors tended not to attend them. Rather, the public event participants were interested in the dancing or interacting on a casual basis with acquaintances and possibly strangers.

The people who did attend the public dances were usually dancers themselves or one member of a couple that included a dancer. Upon occasion people did attend the events just to watch, but this was not very usual since even non-dancers had to pay the admission charge. Some people did take their young children to the dances with them, letting the children occupy themselves during the dancing. Small children were not charged admission, but if they were of an age to dance, they were assessed the fee.

With the demise of neighborhood dances the need for a large number of competent musicians evaporated. With only one or two dances in the whole Trigg County area on any given night, only one or two bands were needed. And at the public dances, the same band played regularly for each different dance event location. For example, the same man, with the same band, ran the square dance at the

American Legion Hall for nearly twenty years. This situation definitely contributed to the decline in the number of active local musicians who played traditional square dance music. Many of the men that I interviewed had, in the past, played for neighborhood dance events, but were no longer playing because they were not needed. Therefore they received no attention or recognition for their musical abilities. The same situation held true for the callers. Only a few have remained active, since the need for large numbers of able prompters diminished.

The events that I have labeled "public dances" were referred to by my informants as "square dances," just was as were the events that I called "neighborhood dances." This seems to indicate a continuity in the local taxonomy of dance events that shows the relationship of public dances to neighborhood dances. The two types of events only overlapped in time for a brief period, if at all; and despite the differences in them, they filled the same niche of "dance event." Public dances, however, were not wholly limited in the actual dancing to just square dances. From the very beginning these events included the popular round dances that were current in other part of the United States. While the precedent existed at some of the neighborhood dances for including round dancing within so-called square dance events, at the public dances these popular styles were a much more important portion of the actual dance activity.

Based upon my own observation of the public dances at the Gibbs Community Center in 1979, about half the dances were not square dances. The band would play about four Nashville-style country songs (frequently ones that had recently been popular on country radio stations) and

would then play three square dances. This pattern was confirmed by several of my informants as being the norm for public dances over the years, with the round dancing varying somewhat with what was current elsewhere at the time. I assume that this re-ordering of taste in dancing was a reflection of several interacting factors. First was the influx of new people in the area with different and perhaps broader expectations of the kind of dancing they wanted to participate in. This was coupled with the fact that many area residents had been exposed to these dances while in the army during the War or while working outside of the Trigg County area. A second important influence was the tremendous popularity of country music broadcast over radio and, later, television. This new element in the local musical experience helped create a demand for this kind of music.

The structure of the bands that played for public dances reflected these new tastes. Instead of being a loose conglomeration of musicians who played only traditional square dance music with perhaps a smattering of popular tunes, the new bands were formal groups of musicians who regularly played together. The bands in the 1970s included electric guitars, electric basses and sometimes drums or a piano, in addition to the fiddle and banjo. At the Gibbs Community Center dances in fact, the fiddler only played for the square dance numbers. The Nashville-style band, which included a lead singer, played for all the tunes, both traditional and modern. The lead singer also played rhythm guitar and served as the caller for the square dances.

The square dancing at public dances was fundamentally the same

as that done at neighborhood events and picnics and barbecues. The dancing was still done by couples arranged in a large circle, and the figures were the same as at the older events. The primary difference was that at the public dances everyone danced at the same time, rather than having one or several couples work their way around the circle dancing with everyone else in turn. At the public dances the caller would start everyone out in one large circle and after the introductory portion of the set would call the figure out to the couples a few times. After that the dancers were on their own. It was not uncommon to have the sets of couples out of time with each other so that occasionally a couple would have to wait a few measures for the next couple that they were to dance with.

Buck dancing as a solo display was absent from the public dances. In a residual form it was used to fill in the time while waiting for the next couple in turn to be ready to start the figure.

The dancing at the public dances, both round and square, was still predicated on couples, and it was still technically acceptable to ask anyone to dance. However, it tended to be the case that the couples were composed of persons who were already acquainted, either through work, school or neighborhood residence. Over a period of time, though, people would get to know each other at least casually through regular attendance at the public dances. Being asked to dance by a total stranger was discomforting to many people and this caused fricton between some area residents and persons they considered to be outsiders. This was especially apparent when soldiers from Fort Campbell attended dances. These young men had few opportunities to interact with young women and several informants referred

to this situation with what I interpreted as distaste.

Just as the event form changed to meet new needs and conditions, behavior that was considered acceptable at the dances changed. For the first time a single man and woman could attend a dance together, and although in some cases the woman might be chaperoned, it was no longer the norm. While often young people would travel to the dances in groups, it was now possible for a man to ask a woman to accompany him and he would pick her up and take her home. This new state of affairs was probably a combination of changing behavioral standards and the realities of attending a dance quite a distance from home where travel by automobile was a necessity.

Drinking was still a concurrent activity with the dances. At a few places, such as the dance in Hopkinsville, it was permissable to discretely carry alcoholic beverages into the dance hall. In Trigg County, which was legally dry, however, the drinking still took place outside of the building. But the drinking was more open, and for the first time women and teenagers would sometimes participate. Drinking was still primarily a male province, however.

Fighting continued to be a problem at the public events. But instead of peer pressure, legal authorities were instrumental in breaking up the fray. At the dance in Hopkinsville two policemen were on duty to ensure that the situation would not get out of control. But violent behavior continued to give dances a bad name to some people, which was not wholly undeserved. The experience of the owner of Gibbs Community Center clearly indicates the extent of the problem. In 1979 Frank Gibbs decided not to continue holding square dances at his facility because he felt that he could not afford

the repercussions if someone were seriously injured while at a dance on his property. His mother explained the problem to me as, "Teenagers now want to drink and show out and be smart and cause a little trouble." His father said, "One reason why he /Frank Gibbs/ stopped /holding dances/, we had quite a lot of disorder it seems, you know. And he got afraid somebody might, maybe, get hurt, or something like that. And he just shut it down on that account."[28] These fears were realized when a shooting incident grew out of a fight during a dance.

By the end of 1979 there were no public dances held regularly in Trigg County. The dances at Fort Campbell and Pete Light Springs Restaurant were discontinued for reasons that I am unaware of. The dance at Gibbs Community Center was ended for fear of violence. And the biggest dance in the county, the one at the American Legion Hall, was forced to close down in the 1960s by residents of a new subdivision surrounding the building who complained of the noise. But some area residents are still active participants in the public dances held in surrounding counties. Although there seems to be no interest by county residents in finding a new location within the county at which to continue local public dances, there has been some talk of starting a dance in Dover, Tennessee, just across the state line.

Obviously with the changing social conditions in this area, dance events of any kind had become much less important social activities for a variety of reasons. When they no longer filled the need

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[28]Gibbs and Gibbs, 23 March 1979.

for a general social gathering, the older dance event forms metamorphosed into the public dance, an event suited to those persons who wanted to continue dancing. A consequence of these changes was that the dances were no longer attended by a broad spectrum of groups or persons. The public dances instead were activities in which small groups of acquaintances, male and female, tended to socialize with each other while not actively becoming involved with groups of other individuals whom they did not know.

These new events reflected and were influenced by all the various tensions active within the local social structure, a social structure which was undergoing transitions in many different aspects of day-to-day living. But the form of a social activity with square dancing at its center was tenacious. It did not disappear with changing conditions. Rather it changed to fit the new situation, evolving from the traditional dance events that had been part of the local culture from the earliest days of settlement of Trigg County.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

By describing the entire complex of dance event forms current in Trigg County, Kentucky, during the twentieth century, I have attempted to show the relationships between four event forms: neighborhood dances, play-parties, picnics and barbecues and public dances. The central identifying characteristic of these social interactive events was square dancing, and the different event types were tailored to specific sets of circumstances. These events varied in many particular characteristics. The most extreme form of variation might be seen in the case of the play-party, a pseudo-dance event that did not include square dancing at all, but instead substituted the playing of party games into the structure of a dance event.

This entire group of events varied with the changing nature of the local life style and was structured at any given point in time in such a way as to reinforce the beliefs and behavioral norms common to that period. Thus, play-parties and neighborhood dances existed simultaneously to meet the need for social interactive events for the residents of the relatively small geographical units that formed the focus of most daily activities. Play-parties developed to fill the niche created by the rejection of dancing for religious reasons and the objection to the rowdy behavior frequent at the neighborhood dances. Picnics and barbecues continued the tradition

of dance events through the summer months when the neighborhood events were not practical because of the heat. These events also introduced the profit motive for the promoter into the set of ideas about dance events for the first time.

With the dramatic changes in the county during the 1930s-1940s, a new event form, the public dance, emerged to meet the new circumstances of the residents of the area. This new form grew out of the older events and combined elements of the different traditional forms in a new way to meet changed conditions. While the importance of the public dances was not equal to that of the older forms, for a limited number of area residents they continued to provide both the opportunity to square dance and to socialize, albeit within a less intimate setting that included many strangers.

To clarify some of the relationships between the event forms, I have set out in chart form (see Table 1) some of the major definitive characteristics of all four types. While all the elements cannot be so easily codified, this abbreviated descriptive form serves to summarize some of the features that help to distinguish these events. The chart also shows that none of the forms are completely unrelated to the larger group and, in fact, there is much overlap in the structure of the entire complex.

The chart helps to emphasize the patterns of relationship among the dance event forms, but others of the common traits of these events are not apparent in this graphic display. All the events had three concurrent secondary activities with the dancing or game-playing that were important to the structure of the entire event: drinking, fighting and courting. The issue of the consumption of alcoholic beverages

TABLE 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF DANCE EVENT FORMS IN TRIGG COUNTY, KENTUCKY/TWENTIETH CENTURY

Event form	Attend-ance	Number of partici-pants	Time period	Sponsor/ space	Profit for sponsor	Payment by parti-cipants	Profit for band & caller	Schedul-ing
Play-parties	Neigh-borhood	8-40	Settle-ment to World War II	Host/ private home	No	None	Not appli-cable	Whim of host/ winter
Neigh-borhood dances	Neigh-borhood	8-50	Settle-ment to World War II	Host/ private home	No	Dancers only	Paid "on the corner"	Whim of host/ winter
Picnics & barbecues	Neigh-borhood + larger area	up to 200	Settle-ment to World War II	Promoter/ semi-private	Yes	Dancers only + sale of food	Paid "on the corner"	Whim of promoter/ summer
Public dances	Public at large	up to 700	World War II to 1979	Promoter/ public	Yes	Everyone + sale of food	Fixed sum	Regular by calen-dar/all year

touched upon all the event forms; but attitudes towards this behavior varied from disallowing it at some play-parties, to surreptitious acceptance, to full acknowledgement at neighborhood and public dances and picnics and barbecues. Fights were a possibility at all the events, although the methods of controlling this behavior varied among them. And all the events served as settings for courting among eligible young persons, although the manner in which this activity was carried out varied from the more controlled and restrained behavior of the traditional events to the more informal and less restricted behavior of the public dances.

This study has examined the entire realm of dance events in one location, a perspective that has not been taken in any other academic project. Instead, the common perspective used to study Anglo-American traditional dance has been to study one event form in isolation. By examining and describing all the dance events in Trigg County, it becomes clear that a basic entity that can be generalized as a "dance event" can exist in several manifestations, each different form structured in a slightly different way to meet divergent needs of social groups which are being acted upon by varying sociological pressures. The general event form is not rigid; it is influenced by numerous pressures and tensions that are part of the ongoing process of change over time. As new and different elements are introduced into the lives of community residents, the event forms either disappear because they are no longer appropriate, important or necessary, or they metamorphose into new forms that meet the new requirements of the moment.

Certainly there are many additional studies that can be done in conjunction with or in addition to a descriptive one such as I have undertaken. Studies more concerned with the structure of a particular type of event or complex of events, functional studies of the role that dance events play in a community, and studies of the actual square dancing and movement forms are just a few of the possibilities. Another useful project could be undertaken to tie more directly the changes in the local social structure to the changes in the dance events. And with the dearth of formal studies of any kind of square dance events, any descriptive studies would be a contribution to the field and would be useful in developing a better picture of traditional square dance events throughout the United States.

It has been the intent of this study to describe the complex of dance events from the perspective of their social interactive nature. In all the cases examined, different groups of persons interacted in differing ways, each one filling a unique niche in the structure of the whole. The generic relationships of the various event forms have been described, and the particular variations of each different activity have been enumerated to clarify the pattern of dance events as community social activities within a particular limited geographic and political area. I hope that this study has contributed to the body of information on traditional dance events in Anglo-American culture and that it thereby contributes to the understanding of how communities provide settings in which their members can socialize and reaffirm the very existence of community.

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